

Relationship Spectrum Activity¹

Goals

- To provide an opportunity to define, discuss and identify the distinctions between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationship scenarios.
- To highlight what a supportive relationship can look like.

Senior 1-4 Education Curriculum Connections

This activity contributes to the following Student Specific Learning Outcomes:

Family Studies

- *S1 5.1.3 Identify behaviours that promote health and wellness.*

Guidance Education *GLOs under Personal/Social Component.*

Physical Education

- *K.3.5.B.4 Identify available community supports that promote safety and community health.*
- *K.3.S1.B.5a Analyze issues related to violence prevention in a variety of contexts.*
- *K.3.S1.B.6a Differentiate among the terms associated with abusive situations.*
- *K.3.S1.B.6b Identify skills and community resources for addressing problems associated with sexually abusive behaviours.*
- *K.4.S1.B.1a Describe ways to treat others for developing healthy and meaningful relationships.*
- *K.4.S1.B.2b Identify appropriate social behaviours for developing meaningful interpersonal relationships.*
- *K.5.S1.E.2a Identify the components for building and maintaining healthy, close relationships.*
- *K.5.S1.E.3b & K.5.S2.E.3b Examine the influences on making decisions for responsible sexual behaviour.*
- *K.5.S1.E.3c & K.5.S2.E.3c Review personal responsibilities and sources of support with regard to sex-related health issues.*
- *K.5.S2.E.2 Analyze the components in different case scenarios for building and maintaining healthy relationships.*
- *S.4.S1.A.3 Apply interpersonal skills in case scenarios related to developing close, meaningful relationships.*
- *12.HR.1 Demonstrate understanding of the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy, relationships, and discuss factors that might influence their development.*

¹Adapted from the Relationship Spectrum from www.loveisrespect.org, accessed June 16, 2016.

- *12.HR.4 Apply problem-solving and decision-making strategies to identify and prevent the development of abusive relationships and/or to end unwanted relationships.*
- *12.HR.5 Apply problem-solving and decision-making strategies to recognize unhealthy relationships, and identify community supports and services to assist in the healthy resolution of relationship issues.*

Have Ready

- Relationship scenario cards (see below).

Activity Introduction

- Ask youth, **“Why do people start dating in the first place?”** Want to have someone to hang out with (companionship), are attracted to them, like each other, etc. **“What is good about relationships?”** Having fun, spending time with someone, having someone to trust, having support (someone who is there for you), affection, being respected, they are exciting, etc. **Relationships are defined as healthy when they include things like equality, respect, assertive communication, trust and feeling accepted for who you are.**
- **If things like trust or respect are missing then we would define that as an unhealthy relationship. On a more extreme end, if there is an element of fear or violence, we would call that an abusive relationship. Abuse is always a choice.**
- **Provide a disclaimer mentioning these issues can be hard to talk about and that it is okay for them to “zone out,” draw, etc.**
- Tell youth that for this next activity we’re going to look at different scenarios that could play out in a relationship. We have to decide and discuss which category we believe the relationship goes into and why. The categories are healthy, unhealthy and abusive. We’ll hear from the group with the card first then we open up the discussion to the rest of the group.

Instructions

- Choose which statements to use for this activity (approximately 6-12). The statements you choose will depend on how much time there is and which scenarios may be most relevant for the group. Make sure cards from each type are addressed.

- Divide youth into smaller groups and hand out scenarios asking youth to think about what type of relationship it is - healthy, unhealthy or abusive.
- Priority for each card is for youth to share their thoughts and discuss. Cards can be debriefed as necessary.

Healthy

My partner is happy for me when I do the things I enjoy, even if it's not with them.

Your partner can be supportive of your hobbies and activities by being interested, encouraging, helping out and giving you the space to pursue things that are important to you.

You miss your partner when you go away with your family but have a really good time anyway.

Having a good time without your partner is an okay thing to do. It can mean you have lots more to tell each other when you are together.

My partner and I don't tell each other everything but we share lots and trust each other.

You have enough respect for each other to understand what information should be shared, hobbies and mutual interests, and what should not be shared like passwords to social media sites and pin codes to bank accounts. You understand boundaries are helpful and necessary in a healthy relationship.

You feel jealous sometimes in your relationship but trust your partner and know how to take care of your uncomfortable feelings.

Do people feel jealous sometimes? Yes. In healthy relationships, it's important to take responsibility for our feelings. **Healthy ways of dealing with jealousy are recognizing it is a normal emotion and understanding we are capable of healthy and respectful reactions no matter what the situation.**

If our partner is trying to make us jealous, that is unhealthy and not okay to do, but we can still choose to deal with our feelings in a healthy way.

Sometimes, giving ourselves time and space is a good idea. We may need time to calm down and to "let go" of fear or insecurities we are feeling. Things to do can be taking a walk, go for a ride, listen to music that is soothing and talking it through with someone we trust. Sometimes in relationships, we find our

feelings of jealousy are because of actual things our partner has done like cheating, not telling us the truth. We might have to decide if the relationship is still the one for us. If it's not, that is an okay choice and we may have other relationships in the future. However, if we are choosing to stay in a relationship that brings up our feelings of jealousy we need to figure out ways to handle that feeling in a healthy and respectful way.

Unhealthy

I feel uncomfortable sending naked pictures to my partner.

In a healthy relationship, your feelings and boundaries are respected. It is not okay to pressure to send or share the photos without consent. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Check out www.thatsnotcool.com for help to stop digital dating abuse. Also, it is not your fault if someone is sharing your pictures. If someone has shared your pics, talk to an adult you trust or check-out the website www.needhelpnow.ca. If consent is happening (meaning both people feel comfortable) then sharing pics is okay with the understanding that they belong to the person(s) in the photo, and are not to be shared with anyone else. Also, if taking pictures/videos, avoiding identifying features, such as your face, markings, tattoos etc. and using messaging apps that delete pictures/videos once viewed can help you stay protected. FYI: Supreme Court of Canada decided in 2001 that young people have a right to express themselves sexually by creating and sharing sexual images of themselves as long as it is 100% consensual, the images stay private (are not shared or distributed by the person who receives them to someone else who was never supposed to see them), there is no physical or sexual assault or abuse depicted in the image or video.² FYI: It is against the law in Canada to send sexual pictures or videos of anyone who is, or appears to be, under 18 years old. This includes taking and sending sexual pictures or videos of yourself. According to section 163.1 of the Canadian Criminal Code, sexual pictures or videos of people under 18 years old, or who look like they are under 18 years old, are child pornography.)³

My partner gives me too many hickies to show how much they love me.

If hickies are being used without consent or to show that a person is “taken” or “owned” by their partner that is control and abuse, not love. As long as

²www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/cndii-cdncii/p6.html, accessed October 3, 2016.

³www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-163.1.html, accessed October 3, 2016.

consent is happening meaning both people are comfortable with it, hickies are okay.

I try to make my partner jealous.

Jealousy is not a good way to gauge how much someone cares for us. Jealousy is a complicated emotion that is about self-esteem, past experiences, and fear of losing someone. There are healthier ways to ask for support, affection and attention from a partner. Trying to make someone jealous is not part of a healthy relationship.

My partner texts me more than I want and gets upset if I don't respond.

Everyone deserves space even from their partner. Feeling as though you don't have enough is a sign that your boundaries are not being respected.

You had a really good day but don't want to share it because you know your partner won't want to hear about it.

Feeling the need to leave things out or hide things from your partner might mean there is a lack of support. If you feel worse or "taken down" after sharing your good feelings with a partner, it might be a sign of abuse. In a healthy relationship, a partner thinks your happiness is important. A supportive partner takes the time to hear about your day.

It Depends

My partner doesn't participate in my spirituality with me.

Everyone has a right to their own spirituality. That also means that no one should be forced to participate in a religion or spirituality if they don't want to. In some relationships partners practice different religions or spirituality and are totally okay with that. But if someone is put down because of their beliefs, feels like they can't practice their spirituality because of their relationship or their partner is using religion or spirituality to control or manipulate them, it is abuse. In a healthy relationship people feel free to practice their beliefs even if they are different from their partners.

On a larger scale, Residential Schools on this land were examples of spiritual abuse. These were places where Indigenous children and youth were forced to go by the Canadian government. The goal was to assimilate the children into white Christian culture and in the process have them not be "Indian" anymore. There were many ways the government tried to do this and we still see this

racist idea existing in our society often showing itself in the news/media and commonly through Canadians opinions in social media.

Abusive

My partner hits the wall and/or throws things when they are angry.

It is not okay for a partner to use intimidation, even if they are angry and you are in a disagreement. Whether the anger is directed at you or not, anger should not be scary. This is abuse because it feels scary and sends the message that more abuse could follow. In a healthy relationship, people get angry and find ways of dealing with feelings that do not scare their partner.

It can help to think of anger as a secondary emotion. A primary feeling is what is felt right before we feel angry. We always feel something else first before we get angry. We might first feel afraid, attacked, offended, disrespected, forced, trapped, or pressured. If any of these feelings are intense enough, we think of the emotion as anger. In a healthy relationship, people still get angry but find ways to take responsibility for their feelings that don't scare their partner. Developing a relationship to oneself can help to learn how to manage our feelings.

My partner asks to borrow money all the time and doesn't pay me back.

Not returning the money that has been lent is financial abuse. You have no obligation to lend or give money to anyone if you don't want to, your partner included. Financial abuse is using money to control another person. **If someone is doing sex work they have rights too. People under eighteen, by law, are not allowed to sell sex (for money, drugs, food, protection, etc.) and it is considered exploitation if this is happening.**⁴ In healthy relationship partners understand their money is their own and don't feel guilt or pressure to "share" it.

My partner makes fun of my job and makes me feel bad for working weekends.

Everyone has the right to work and earn money if they want to. If a partner is making you feel bad for working or intentionally trying to ruin your experience or reputation, then it would be considered financial abuse.

⁴www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/strategy_on_sexual_exploitation.html, accessed September 5, 2018.

When there is a disagreement, your partner uses the silent treatment or blocks you on social media.

In a healthy relationship, if there is a disagreement people often let their partner know they need to “take time” to cool down, that way they are more able to find solutions, not so they can control their partner. The silent treatment sends the message that the partner it’s used on is not even worth talking to (dehumanizing) and leaves them with no option of a solution. It is used as a method of control and for one person to have power over their partner. This is abuse.

My partner refuses to use a condom/sex dam.

Everyone has the right to be safer and use protection when having sex. If one partner wants to use protection, not using one, or pressuring them not to, is sexual assault.

When we have an argument my partner hides my stuff so I can’t leave.

If someone is keeping you somewhere against your will, it is abuse. We have a right to leave a situation safely. In a healthy relationship it can actually work out for people to take time and cool down so they can come back together in a clearer headspace to work things out. FYI: Canada’s Criminal Code section 279 (2) defines forcible confinement as “every one who, without lawful authority, confines, imprisons or forcibly seizes another person.”

Debrief

- Trusting ourselves, our instincts and feelings can help us figure out where we are on the relationship spectrum. **No matter where we land we can all work at building healthier relationships, keeping in mind abuse is a choice and in that situation sometimes ending a relationship is the healthiest choice we can make.** If people recognize they are using abuse it’s actually a good thing because then we can choose to change our behaviour and learn to become supportive partners. **We are all deserving of having healthy boundaries, support and respect in our relationships.**

Additional Activities

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

- Action Planning Activity
- Qualities of a Healthy Relationship Brainstorm
- Fun and Single Relay Race

Relationship Activity Spectrum Cards

When there is a disagreement, my partner uses the silent treatment or blocks me on social media.

My partner is happy for me when I do the things I enjoy, even if it's not with them.

My partner refuses to use a condom/sex dam.

I miss my partner when I go away with my family but I have a really good time anyway.

My partner texts me more than I want and gets angry if I don't respond.

My partner doesn't participate in my spirituality with me.

My partner likes to give me too many hickies to show how much they love me.

My partner and I don't tell each other everything but we share a lot and trust each other.

I feel pressure to share nudes (naked pics) with my partner.

I feel jealous sometimes in my relationship but trust my partner and know how take care of my uncomfortable feelings.

I had a really good day but don't want to share it with my partner because I know they won't want to hear about it.

I try to make my partner jealous.

When we have an argument, my partner hides my stuff so I can't leave.

My partner hits the wall and/or throws things when they get angry.

My partner asks to borrow money all the time and doesn't pay me back.

My partner makes fun of my job and makes me feel bad for working weekends.

